

LLANCARFAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER 171 SEPT 2017



Conservation training high on the wall of St. Cadoc's church. Was this the finishing line for the astonishing discoveries?

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EDITORIAL

Back in May – masquerading as an 'independent scholar' - I gave a paper at an American conference in Florence. (I'm not trying to show off, honest, and I certainly bow down before our neighbour Becci, who last year addressed 700 delegates in Singapore on the invaluable subject of back pain.) My paper told about an obscure Florentine incident in the life of a little-known Lancashire novelist. To my surprise, they gave me a 20-minute slot to present it in. Well, the setting was lovely, high on the Fiesole hillside in *La Pietra* mansion, and it had a stunning view over a sunlit Florence. What's not to like - in exchange for 3,600 words?

So Penny & I enjoyed a splendid break revisiting the sights of Florence – and, for the first time, we took a bus to the city of Siena. Siena has a striking 'duomo', a vast cathedral of carved stones triumphing high on a hilltop. Not only this. Immediately opposite it, reached by *Via Pellegrini*, or the *Pilgrims' Way*, rises Santa Maria Della Scala, a thousand-year-old pilgrims' hospital. Most intriguingly, this remained a hospital right until the turn of this millennium, so only recently have visitors been able to see its stunning wall-paintings. These depict not the pantheon of religion, but illustrate the charitable deeds that the hospice offered to travellers who followed, and then faltered, on the pilgrim way from Canterbury to Rome.

Well, the Llancafán relevance is – because wherever you go so often throws light on where you come from – these paintings turned out to be a sophisticated mirror of our own 'Acts of Mercy'. (On which, conservation work began again on August 11th, closing the church, except for services, until September 29th.) Here then, in the interim calm, and as we await the excitement of what lies beneath the limewash of the chancel arch, is a chance to review the outcome of earlier, very successful training sessions, those held back in the Summer of 2016. And then on page 5, we compare Siena & Llancafán's 'Acts of Mercy', those universal themes of decency.

TELL-TALE SIGNS : CONSERVATION TRAINING IN ST. CADOC'S

As the splendid cover picture shows, the educational intentions of those who created our astonishing 15th century paintings have found new life here in the 21st century. Over the Summer of 2016 (and indeed earlier) the church yet again seized the chance to be a seat of learning. The drive to interpret and explain for all parishioners and visitors was, from the start, the key to the Heritage Lottery funding which revealed the unique scheme of paintings. Now Jane Rutherford can proudly report that many very practical training opportunities also emerged, as it were, from under the centuries of limewash.

18 students were placed here during 2015 and 2016, most of them working over 2016's summer months. They came not only from Britain, but also from America, Germany, Greece, Poland, Australia & Spain. Mainly in higher education, they came to study 'materials & techniques used in the conservation of historic surfaces' and learn 'how to recognize the tell-tale signs of paintings surviving behind layers of limewash'.

Some might ask what possible 'tell-tale signs' the trainees were likely to reveal, working on the arcaded south face of the wall which separates the north & south aisles. They in fact discovered a surprising number of things. On the cover you see them learning to fill cavities with 'slaked lime-putty : sand mortar'. The preparation of slaked lime mortar, slurry, and toned limewashes is, as the students now understand, a major aspect of the conservation process. Likewise the minute removal of over-paint, plain limewash and surface deposits, the stabilising, grouting, filling losses, these *are* all the unromantic bread & butter of the conservator's craft. But every now and then, the students found themselves rewarded by the thrill of revealing fragments of the ancient ochre and lampblack artistry.

The international students, often hosted by welcoming locals, arrived with varied experience & knowledge. When they left, they were fired up to forge careers in caring for historic surfaces, whether they were in future hoping to work with paintings, plasterwork, stone or even polychromed sculpture.

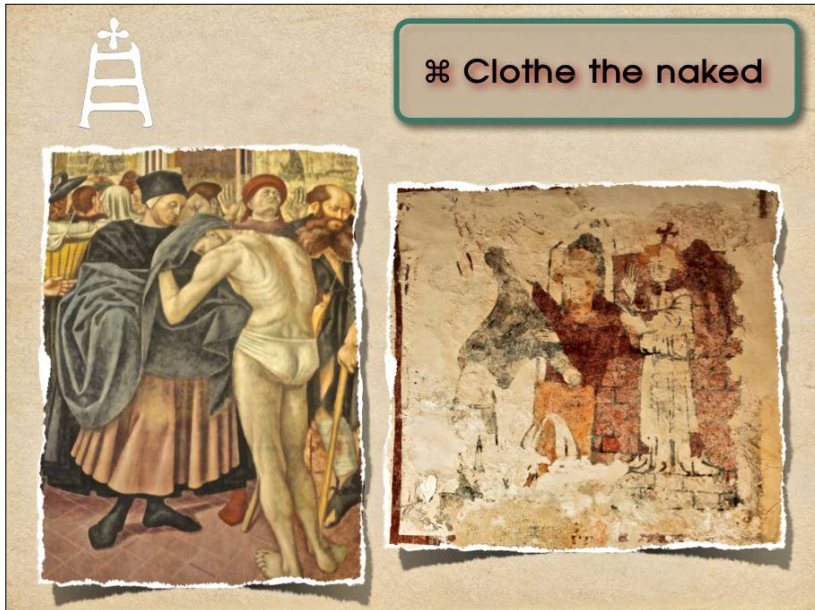
However, they also left further discoveries for *us* to absorb. During this period yet another figure has emerged (on the south wall, near the ancient reredos). Yes, traces of red & black *have* appeared above the arcades, barely decipherable relics of illustrations and texts. But maybe the biggest surprise is a doorway halfway up the wall. This door gave access from the north aisle's vanished raised platform of the rood loft, passing through to a 'matching' elevated platform in the south aisle. In time the door's carved rubble filling *could* yield clues to the church old interior, purged during the Reformation. So St. Cadoc continues to reveal unparalleled gifts of learning.



And where does this leave the church? We asked on the front cover if the epic revelations of the last ten years have finally come to an end. Well, early in 2017 Jane spent several more weeks very nearly completing work on the presentation of surviving elements of the Acts of Mercy. Another 4th Act of Mercy (of an original 7) is now much clearer, but it did need further work before its subject matter was confidently identified.



The good news comes with the knowledge that further conservation work has now begun again, owing to a significant donation from the *Simon Gibson Charitable Trust*. Underway are plans to open the newly-found doorway, and to reveal the secrets of the north aisle's chancel arch. Exploratory 'windows' in the lime layers here have confirmed several years ago the presence of art work. Present scaffolding stays in place until the end of September. For the moment then we have yet to see the latest discoveries on the chancel arch. For the time being, in words that might be spoken by the chancel arch itself, we must just quell our curiosity and 'Watch This Space'.



THREE ACTS OF MERCY The Mirrored Themes

It is hard to believe that these Siena wall-paintings (see the *Editorial*) are from 1440, decades earlier than St. Cadoc's. But *our* artist was no photo realist. He was just a master of the cartoon, and notable in his own right.

The spectacle of Siena's *Santa Maria Della Scala* reaches across a whole roof and wall, while *our Acts of Mercy* tuck themselves tight into a rural church. But the lessons of caring are very much the same.



The most obvious visual parallels can be seen in 'Clothing the Naked'. In both images the carers bring warmth to a (barely decent!) underpanted form. Our do-gooder has the added impact of being blessed by an angel. The Siena hospital stays more down to earth.

In Siena's 'Burying the Dead' you can see the coffin entering at the top right hand corner of the scene. Our St. Cadoc's monks sing the last rites over the shrouded body, while a pilgrim learns his moral lessons.



As for 'Visiting the Sick', our patient is receiving the wafers and the oil of sacrament. Meanwhile, the Siena image reveals a less obvious reason for an under-bed commode. The Siena hospital doctors appear to be seriously assessing the important evidence of a bottle of urine! In both Siena and Llancafarn, all human life is traced upon the painted walls.

It is with genuine pleasure that this, your Newsletter, has heard again from the former chairman of your society, the one and only Mike Crosta, OBE. Villagers know that Mike went through life-changing surgery about a year ago. Only now has he felt able to commit his thoughts to writing, and begun again to share his perceptions and experiences. Jumping in at the deep end, Mike feared this particular piece was unsuitable for a newsletter. We disagree. We look forward to welcoming more of his unsuitable pieces in future issues!

DON'T PUT THINGS OFF

I had a soreness near my left ear. A spine consultant could only see a cyst. But twelve months later, it had developed into something a little more uncomfortable. So I saw a different consultant, and he too thought it was a cyst. But he said he had 'a feeling'. Then the next day I had a scan, suggesting yet again that it was a cyst. The consultant couldn't see anything else, but he had a nagging feeling and wanted more tests.

It was then that he found a small tumour right behind the tongue – which was the reason why he couldn't see it earlier.

I had a choice to make. It was the sort of choice that you need help with. The consultant asked for a meeting to include my son and daughter. There were three choices : (1) to do nothing; (2) to have chemotherapy; (3) take out the tongue and lose one's speech.

Chemo didn't like that tumour. Take it out then, and it's gone! No guarantees – but the only choice was the operation. Twelve hours of it, followed by four weeks in hospital. They got it all out. And those twelve hours included opening up my leg, knee to thigh, then using the skin to repair my throat. Not exactly a load of laughs.

Still, I've been seen regularly since then, and things are OK so far. Certainly the consultant could not have been more helpful. So perhaps the most helpful thing I can say is to repeat the moral. Don't put things off.

P.S. Some time ago at Christmas a knock on the door revealed a gentleman I had not seen for a long time. He sold cards that he had made and printed himself, and this time he brought calendars. Nothing remarkable in that, except that he suffered from an illness that one would think would make it impossible. He had little control of his limbs or speech. He staggered from house to house. I suspect too he has been sent packing by many others who were scared by his appearance.

But if he ever does come again, can you take a little time with him? You *can* understand some of what he says. And I think he has a lot of courage.

WHAT'S OCCURIN'? OR MAYBE EVEN OCCUR'D!

SOCIETY DATES SCHEDULED FOR 2017

Next Committee Meeting : Tuesday 5 September

General Society Events :

- 22 Sept Annual Dinner : See enclosure for details & menu
8 Dec Christmas Social Evening

Llancarfan Community Cinema : Autumn Programme

- 8 Sept *Going in Style*
A daring pensioners' heist on their pension-absconding bank.
- 13 Oct *Hidden Figures*
Three African-American women launch John Glenn into orbit.
- 10 Nov *Their Finest*
Romantic propagandists film in Cornwall during London blitz.
- 7 Dec *Loving Vincent*
Van Gogh's last days in Arles hand-animated from his paintings.
- 15 Dec *Beauty & the Beast*
Live-action family treat finds the humanity in a time-trialled tale.

Thanks are due to the new volunteer cinema management team (chaired by Jules Neal). They are now slipping into their schedules and popcorn trays (that's the chaps of course) as they inherit the success of our pioneering ciné-champ, Jim Barratt.

Village pride has accompanied and supported our neighbour, Andy Farquarson, who in his official capacity on July 31st, sounded the Last Post during the Memorial Ceremonies at the Commonwealth War Grave Commission's Tyne Cot cemetery in Belgium, marking the centenary of the first day of Passchendaele.

Our condolences go to neighbours who in the last weeks have suffered private grief through family bereavement. The village is here for you.

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NEXT COPY, NEWS &
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21 NOVEMBER 2017

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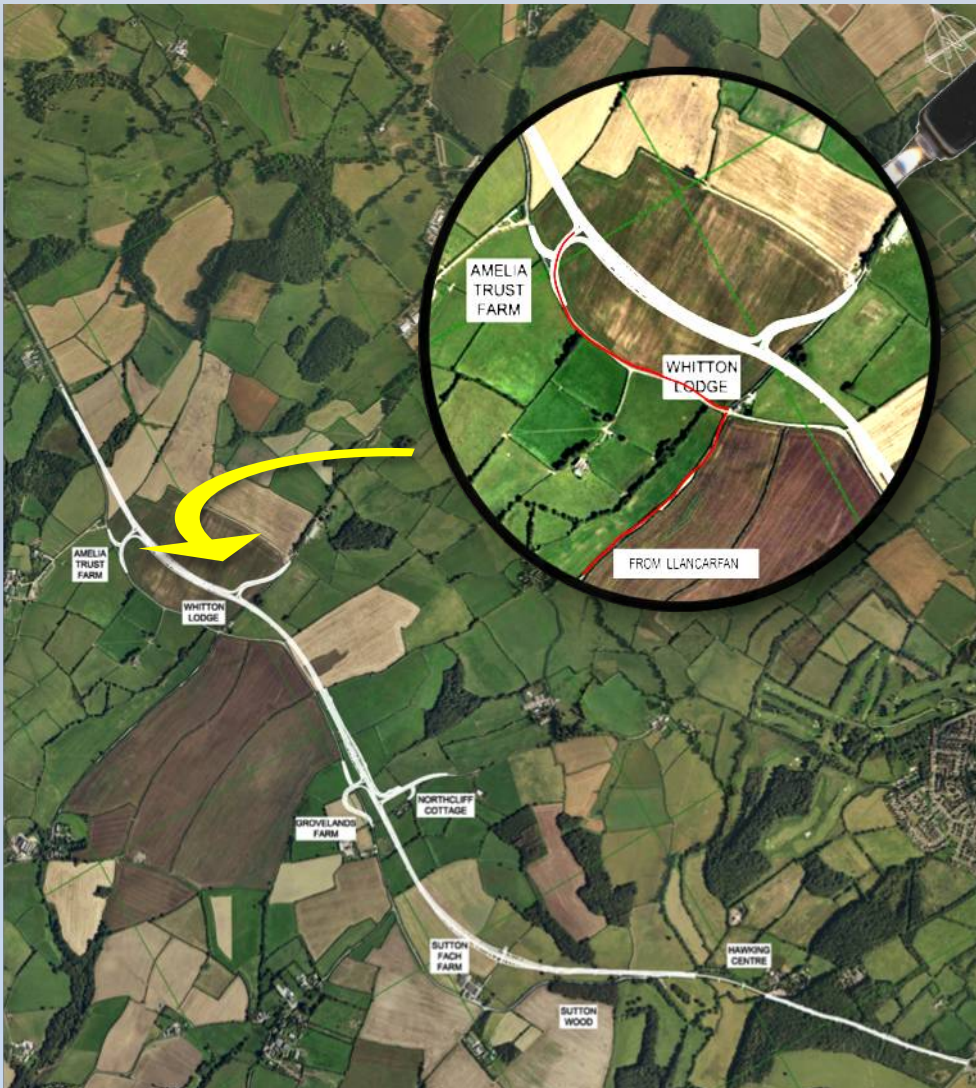
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THE PROS & CONS OF A STRAIGHTER FIVE MILE LANE?

Councillor

Gordon Kemp has

kindly pointed us at this map of major changes to the Five Mile Lane.

It seems that it's not only those of us who follow the oldest routeway to Cardiff – across behind Dyffryn – who will have to do much to-ing & fro-ing to join the road at Whitton Lodge.

There is no doubt that this was always a hazardous crossing. However, some may wonder if these new junctions to the faster road are a lesser threat to life?

Meanwhile, as we await dramatic disclosures from along the route of the road, both travellers & historians are advised (yet again) to **Watch This Space**.

KINGFISHER



If there's something more competitive than the state of our lawns, it's how many birds we can tempt to the windowsill - even when they should be feeding themselves. But **Veronica Hall** takes the avian awards this month, having discovered a glistening blue kingfisher on the wrong side of her window. Happily he was able to fly off unscathed.



FLOWER POWER

Audrey Baldwin, Ann Ferris, Kay Gay, Alison Hannaby, Cynthia John, Sheelagh Lewis, & Sue Taylor, tutored in Mary Grey's brilliant Flower Arranging Classes, triumphed in several Vale show classes.

DID LLANCARFAN'S DAI JOHN DEPICT VILLAGE PERSONALITIES?



TEMPTED by the suggestion that this group depiction of Dai Lossin's favourite rugby team featured local characters from Llancarfan, it was easy to be seduced by some similarity between this character [left] and the fondly-recalled villager Tom Shanks. Sadly, it must be an illusion. When Dai John created the above cartoon in about 1910, Tom Shank[lin] looked like the strong-armed village blacksmith's mate he was [rt.] in the 2-shot below. Tom only grew into a colourful lookalike in the 1950's, when Tom Bryer took his characterful likeness below.





VILLAGE PERSONALITIES? THE JOHNS BRED THEIR OWN!

Sadly, very few images seem to have survived from the early 19th century - at least not any dated ones which feature village residents. Nevertheless, having revisited the under-celebrated cartoonist David John on the previous page, this gives us an excuse to highlight yet another family descendant of that talented Llancarfan tribe of John. Her name was Gwyneth White.



You may recall {see *Newsletter 164*) that in the 1880's, Catherine John and her husband William lived at Pancross farm with Catherine's brother, Jenkin Bowen. Their surviving children, David Gwilym, the featured future cartoonist, and his sister Margaret, grew up as teenagers in the heart of the village after they moved to Ty Mawr or Great House. In 1909, aged 26, Margaret married a railway clerk, Thomas White. She gave birth to Gwyneth White on the 12th of November 1910. And it is this baby, surviving to the age of 94, who (like her prestigious uncle) also made her mark on the Vale.

If you search back to *Newsletter 126*, April 2005, you'll see that our history-hound, Phil Watts, was able to re-introduce Gwyneth to *Newsletter* readers just after Miss White sadly died (on January the 8th, 2005). Phil had been prompted to do this following a visit to St. Cadoc's by Margaret Twynham of Penarth. Well it has taken yet another visit by Mrs. Twynham to St. Cadoc's this June for me to catch up with Gwyneth White – whose life I now learn was subsequently celebrated in a book published in 2008 by *Penarth Past*. Though comparatively recent this book is surprisingly difficult to lay hands on. It is called *The Intrepid Miss White*, and certainly whets the readers' curiosity. So I felt it my duty to discover a little more of Miss White & her intrepid nature.



The book was clearly a labour of love for her *Penarth Past* colleagues, that is to say Terry Farrell and other collaborators. He apparently told the *Gem* that 'on her deathbed' he and Margaret Twynham 'promised that we would make sure her diaries, especially the wartime ones, would be published.' The resultant book then is essentially an assembly of some of Gwyneth White's writings, augmented by memories from her friends, and is well worth the reading. It was apparently put together quite quickly as a memorial to Gwyneth, who was, among her other roles, Chairman of the *Penarth Past Oral History Group*. It is appropriate that the book opens with memories of the ceremony of scattering her ashes on her beloved island of Lundy.

Miss White (niece of Dai John) proves to have had a notable talent for recording aspects of her life. And perhaps the most unexpected clue to her characterful story is to be found in a letter which she wrote in 1988 - to of all people the Tax Inspector. 'Dear Sir', she writes :

'The attached leaflet . . . I herewith return, as none of its listed queries bear any relevance to my financial situation . . . I am a single woman, 78 on the 12th of November next, who acted in the capacity of an unsalaried housekeeper to my late father from the age of sixteen until his death in 1975 in his 100th year – quite a long stint.'

Intrepid with the tax man? Now that is brave! And one quickly understands that the book's title has her down to a T. There are several aspects of her life, recalled by her with much vigour and clarity, which justify the word 'intrepid'. For instance, twenty-eight pages contain extracts from her 2nd world war diaries themselves, offering disturbing proof of the need to be 'intrepid' in wartime Penarth and Cardiff :

"Thursday 2nd January 1940. Never to be forgotten in Cardiff . . . We had chosen this night of all nights to go to the flicks . . . [W]e seldom hear gunfire in this well sound-proofed cinema, so when a few minutes after the warning a barrage from Lavernock, which sounded just outside the windows, started up, and was answered by another on the opposite side of the screen from Llandough, which made the screen shiver . . . something was definitely up . . . Cardiff's blitz had come."

In the supporting '*Cisco Kid*' B-Movie an extra enquired 'What's all this shooting about?' This summoned hearty laughs from the audience, who were more than aware that the cinema was literally rocking, she says, from the protective anti-aircraft barrages. When 'at their own risk' they scurried home from the cinema, she, following the 'be prepared' code, tried to fill the bath with emergency water supplies. The water barely trickled from the tap. "The glow in the sky over Cardiff told me where it [the water] was being directed."

After nights of bombing – "they were coming from the sea in high-powered-sounding waves" – Miss White was able to acquaint herself with the devastation. On Tuesday the 7th they went from Penarth into Cardiff :

"Beyond the station, where the line curves round those rows and rows of drab, slummy-looking houses, the full fury of the attack dawned on one. Row after row lay like swathes, flattened out by a giant threshing machine . . . DeBurgh Street had been completely wiped out. Here there were enormous craters where a landmine

had come to rest; in & around them were merged, as if fused in a crucible, masonry, furniture, odd scraps of clothing, metal, gardens and Anderson shelters, all crumpled like silver paper . . . ‘

Astonishingly, stiff-upper-lip humour survived. On February 22nd Gwyneth was irresistibly tempted by ‘an expensive looking macintosh’ in the window of *Marmets* in Queen Street. “I paid them the deposit which secured me the rights of ownership . . . and left them to make the alterations, while I find the rest of the three guineas!” Then on the 26th there was a further Cardiff blitz, with major reported attacks on the City Centre. “I groaned inwardly for my beautiful mack . . . and felt rather more annoyed about its probable fate than thankful that I was still surviving to wear it!” In fact, the next day Gwyneth was able to rescue “my precious coat. It really seems a shame to get it wet!”

These records, from the pen of a John descendant, are powerful accounts of a time when so many found themselves being intrepid. But Miss White (who apart from managing the house did voluntary work at Llandough Hospital) was intrepid in daily peacetime too. Her enthusiasm for plying the river Severn on its paddle steamer service started aged 3, and was famous. She apparently made every possible Severn voyage, often to Lundy, from 1919 to 2004. She was ultimately honoured with a ‘Ticket for Life’ to the paddlers, and was first off the vessel when they opened the new Lundy Island pier.

But *The Intrepid Miss White* also recorded longer sea journeys. The White Funnel Fleet occasionally voyaged down the Severn, round Land’s End, and along the south coast to Brighton. On 21 June, 1934, Gwyneth boarded (not for the last time) the *Brighton Queen*. Her stoical accounts are fascinating :

“There is no sleeping accommodation on these boats and you just have to curl up with a rug in a corner of the saloon.”

But she rallied again, and passing Portland saw that “several destroyers and a submarine were entering the harbour, and Weymouth looked lovely in the sunshine with the figure of George III on horseback cut into the down . . .” From Brighton she then shot home by train to Cardiff by 11 p.m., with (she said) after 600 salty miles at sea, a complexion resembling a ‘boiled lobster’.

You may allow a conservationalistic smile about her walk from Barry to Llandarf in April 1947. Gwyneth’s memories evoke a hunt for violets, a Cuckoo Mill picnic, then heading for Moulton, Walterston, and Llandarf, filling boxes with primroses & cowslips “to send some to at least two people I’d promised”. Then on down the Carvan to see Fonmon’s ‘fine elms’ being felled beyond Kenson Bridge, and to note that a new bungalow had been built in Fonmon - adjoining Rock House, ‘our ancestral home!’ Times do change!



Chair & Beer



HOEDOWN IN THE BARN

Chat & Cheer

On 1 July your Society brought back its **Family Barn Dance & Hog Roast**, courtesy of Julian Radcliffe of Penmark Place Farm. Some 90 party-ers fed, frolicked & fraternised, raising merry hell & a decent donation to charity.



We're All Here!



Hoedown Throwdown



Even Stevens



Fun & Fare



Light Up The Night



Pancross Pam & Her Man



Facebook Frolics



Girls & Twirls



Always One!



BEN'S BIG BELL

Phil Watts and I chimed on about our bells in the last newsletter. Learning now that Big Ben bell is to be all but silenced for the next four years (unless parliament decides it can't serve without its hours being rung, drawn and quartered) we are reminded of another local connection by a new 'Visit the Vale' initiative.

Not only were *our* bells re-cast in the very Whitechapel foundry that made Big Ben, but the *real* Big Ben was a local lad. He was not quite a doorstep local, but Sir Benjamin Hall MP [1802-67] was the lofty master of Hensol Castle. Ben Hall it was who, after the devastating Westminster fire of 1834, oversaw the re-building of Parliament, including the installation of the bell in the clock tower.

The shot above shows the inside of the foundry doorway, and the dimensions that shaped the bell. Your average person can enter beneath, but Big Ben of Hensol would surely have had to duck. At over six foot four, as confirmed by the *History of Parliament* online, Hall had earned the nickname 'Big Ben' even before the bell or the clock (there's some argument) was named after him.



We were reminded of Ben Hall's story on a recent walkabout using a 'Visit the Vale' storytelling app, called *Vale Tales*. These tales can now accompany you along ten 'Vale Trails', regaling you & your visitors with 46 intriguing stories told by another recreated local legend, Iolo Morganwg. Find out more & download the app to a 'GPS enabled mobile device' via this address : <http://www.visitthevale.com/en/Be-Inspired/Vale-Tales.aspx>

Complementing the storytelling are the tried & tested *Vale Trail* walk leaflets, some of which remain in print, and all of which can be downloaded. These delightful leaflets draw upon, and were inspired by, the pioneering work of the local *Valeways* charity, a voluntary initiative which does great work in keeping the Vales' rural pathways passable, well-planned, and full of interest.

WHY A WELSH MEMORIAL TRADITION?

Last time we noted **Stuart Stanton's** observation that the village war memorial was perhaps unique, in that it followed the north-Walian manner of listing 'not only the names of servicemen *but also their addresses*'. This, you'll recall, was the furthest south he'd discovered such an example. **Nigel Williams** of the Llantwit Major History Society has kindly suggested why. He writes :

In the days after the eleventh day of the eleventh month, thoughts turned to how such an event should be commemorated. Indeed there was considerable discussion as to whether it should be commemorated at all. The government had taken a conscious decision at the outbreak of war not to repatriate the bodies of those who fell in battle. However communities had a strong desire to remember their lost ones, be it with a memorial, or hall or even a sports pavilion. Previous conflicts had spawned memorials only in the larger cities. So those heading local committees were in uncharted territory.

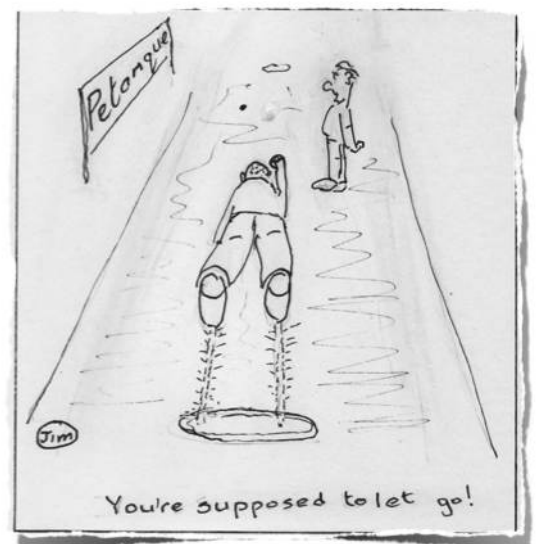
The Rev. William Evans, Minister of Carmel Congregational Chapel, who had lost two of his sons in the war, was the Chairman of the Llancarfan Committee. They worked quickly, so consequently the memorial was one of the first in Wales to be unveiled. Rev. Evans was well-known throughout the Vale, and had been minister at Carmel since 1880. Such was his renown that he had even acquired the soubriquet –“Bishop of the Vale”.

He was Welsh speaking – consequently steeped in Welsh traditions. He was also regularly in touch with the valley communities where mining disasters had their own memorials. Might I suggest these factors could have influenced the 'Welsh' way in which names were recorded on the Memorial?

Nigel Williams

AND FINALLY

Some of us missed out on this year's annual Ruth Watts' Petanque Cup contest. It resulted in a cheerfully conceded win for Ann Ferris, Bryn Llewellyn and Sue Taylor. Meanwhile, a good friend from Plymouth, Jim Whyte, who has challenged Llancarfan on the piste in the past, sent our players this cartoon with his best wishes. It's just exactly what one felt when watching the shot putters and javelin throwers in this Summer's World Athletics Championship!



SAINTE CADO.



**SHOCK
NEWS!**

*Saint
Cadoc was
not a
gentleman!*

Image No:
1950.39.54
courtesy of
MuCEM ;
The Museum
of European &
Mediterranean
Civilisations,
Marseilles

School holidays give the chance for a different pin up on our blackboard. Above is from a very rare broadside from 1863 which relates a Breton legend of St. Cadoc. It tells how 'our' saint made a contract for the devil to build a bridge to his Isle de S. Cado. The deal was that the devil would then possess the first living soul to cross the new bridge. But cunning Cadoc sent his cat across ahead of him. Look closely and you can see the benighted pussy. Not the most saintly of acts? But did Cadoc learn this ungentlemanly ploy from a little old lady at Devil's Bridge in mid-Wales? We think we should be told.